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U.S. Congresswoman Judy Chu, at left, and Los Angeles County Supervisor and Metro Director Gloria Molina, at right, lead unveiling ceremony flanked by community leaders, elected officials, and Metro executives. *Photos: Juan Ocampo*

## Metro honors those buried in long abandoned potter's field discovered during Eastside light rail construction

- More on myMetro.net report: [Colorado Woman Shares Brief History of Memorial Wall Relative](#)

By Jose Ubaldo  
*Media Relations*

(March 9, 2010) A memorial wall honoring poor immigrants and others from the last century, whose remains and artifacts were discovered in unmarked graves outside Evergreen Cemetery in Boyle Heights during construction of a retaining wall for the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension, was unveiled Monday in a ceremony headed by elected officials, community leaders and Metro executives.

The burial sites, some dating to the 1880's – were located in what was a potter's field. Metro did exhaustive historical research to try to identify the remains –many of them Chinese immigrants –and locate modern day relatives with limited success. However, the human remains and artifacts will be reburied inside Evergreen Cemetery next to the historic Chinese Shrine.

Many of the deceased were Chinese immigrant laborers who were denied burial in Evergreen Cemetery. Moreover, their friends and family had to pay \$10 just to bury them in a potter's field for paupers.

"When our construction crews found the human remains and artifacts in the forgotten potter's field, we did the right thing. Work was immediately

stopped. Then we painstakingly preserved what we found and tried to find the descendents," said Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board Chair Ara Najarian.

"Our project Ad Hoc Subcommittee worked for years with community organizations to decide what would be the best way to show respect to the deceased and what should be done with the remains and artifacts. Today, I am pleased that we are honoring these early laborers who helped build Los Angeles by righting an historic wrong."



The memorial wall pays tribute to the remains and artifacts discovered during construction of the Edward R. Roybal Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension.

The Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension, which opened on November 15, 2009, began construction in July 2004.

"I applaud the Ad Hoc Subcommittee's dedicated efforts in overseeing this project and I, along with the community, truly appreciate the hours of meetings, site visits and deliberations that took place to ensure the remains were reburied in a dignified, historically significant and respectful manner," said Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina.

### Discoveries at First and Lorena

On June 22, 2005, construction crews at First and Lorena streets who were widening First Street to accommodate space for the light rail line's east portal began removing a retaining wall on the south side of the Los Angeles County Crematorium. There, buried underground, workers discovered human remains and artifacts.

"Today reminds us that in the City of Los Angeles, history matters," said Metro Director and L.A. City Councilmember José Huizar. "We are here to honor that history, and in particular our City's Chinese history. As we pay our respects today let us remember all that they have done for us."

### Archeologist tracks artifacts, burial sites

Metro immediately suspended construction and brought in an archeologist to do historic research, document all discoveries and try to locate next of kin.

There were approximately 174 burial sites and countless artifacts such as buttons, coffin hardware, Chinese and American artifacts, clothing items, combs, glasses, Chinese porcelain, opium pipes, and other pieces, some dating back about a century.

Established in 1877, Evergreen Cemetery is the oldest secular cemetery

still operating in Los Angeles and is the final resting place of many prominent Los Angeles citizens.

At its inception, Evergreen Cemetery dedicated land outside their gates for a public cemetery for indigent residents and those with unknown next-of-kin. Between 1877 and 1924, approximately 13,000 residents with no known next-of-kin or means to afford a private burial were interred in this public potter's field.

A portion was designated for Chinese burials which, because of discrimination, were prohibited in Evergreen Cemetery. Records indicate that, ultimately, about 1,400 Chinese were buried at a required fee of \$10 each, while all others were buried at no cost.

**Memorial shrine trumps discrimination**

The Chinese community erected a memorial shrine there in 1888, which is now a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument. By 1924, the public cemetery was replaced by a crematorium built by the County of Los Angeles. Subsequently, the grave markers were removed and the exact location of the "potter's field" was forgotten.

Part of the archaeological work was the identification of remains and artifacts. Metro staff made an extraordinary effort to locate next-of-kin.

One was [T.E. Buzbee](#), whose grave marker was recovered from the area of the potter's field discovered during Metro's construction. Buzbee was born on August 12, 1865 and died at age 17 on February 01, 1883.